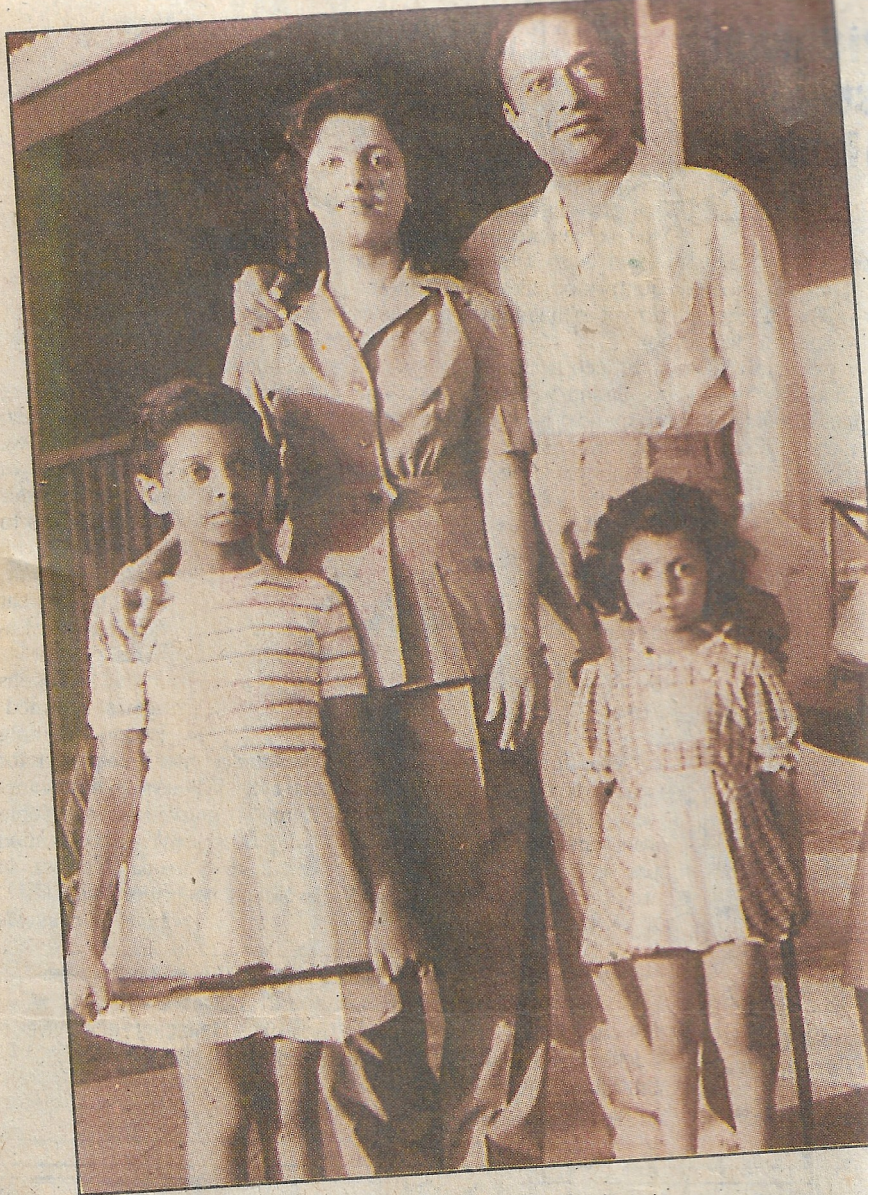




Film-maker for all times

V Shantaram — the man, his life and his work... relived by Nilanjana Sengupta

YESTERDAY, November 18, heralded the birth centenary celebrations of a pioneer in Indian cinema — V Shantaram. Remembered by posterity for his bare narrative and realistic treatment of socially narrative themes — *Duniya Na Mane, Aadmi, Padosi, Do Aankhen Barah Haath* — and a blend of the spectacle and artistry (*Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje, Geet Gaya Patharon Ne, Shakuntala*), Shantaram's career from 1927-77 spans almost the entire history of Indian cinema.

He began in the 1920s (a magical period for the Indian film industry), about 15 years after the genius of Dadasaheb Phalke had enthralled and thrilled wide-eyed audiences around the country. The '20s was the time of

Baburao Painter's special effects and J F Madan's bioscope. Together they became an irreplaceable part of the film movement that swept the nation. With films emerging as the new madness of the times, it was hardly surprising that soon a group of keen young men flocked around Painter. One of them was Rajaram Vanakudre Shantaram. It was not long before this young man went on to carve his own place in the history of Indian cinema.

When Shantaram was only 28 years old — in 1929 — he, along with V G Damle and S Fattelal, established the Prabhat Film Company in Kolhapur (in 1933, it was shifted to Pune, and now houses the hallowed Film and Television Institute of India). It was Shantaram's part-time job as an odd-job boy, sign-painter and door-boy at a

tal tin-shed cinema that provided him his
 ling. Studying closely the personalities he
 w flitting across the silent screen, the 16-
 ar-old boy developed skills of mimicry and
 on became known for his portrayals of
 estern screen favourites, especially that of
 median Foolshead.

By the time India's first talkie *Alam Ara*
 s released in 1931, Shantaram had al-
 ady directed six silent films for Prabhat.
 s first sound film *Ayodhyecha Raja* (1932)
 n him instant recognition, for the film was
 o an attempt at using the mobility of the
 edium effectively, as opposed to the stage-
 ect of the early films.

As a film-maker, Shantaram's portrayal
 women was directed by his concern for
 dated social norms and their effect on
 omen. *Amar Jyoti* (1936), *Duniya Na*
lane (1937), *Aadmi* (1939) were the films.
 and a wronged wife, a child bride and a
 rostitute were their 'heroes'. In real life
 oo, he gave his five daughters the freedom
 o study and choose their own partners.
 Says Madhura Jasraj, his daughter and Pt
 asraj's wife: "Despite his bold subjects, by
 today's norms he will be considered old-
 fashioned. Though there was no restric-

**V Shantaram's biography by
 Madhura Jasraj, *Shantaram*,
 was made into a 53-minute
 film *Portrait of a Pioneer*. The
 film opened the film-maker's
 birth centenary celebrations**

turned to the art director and ordered the
 sets to be rebuilt according to Gopiji's speci-
 fications," says Madhura. Jeetendra, who
 began his career as an extra in *Navrang*
 (1962), says: "There was no aspect of film-
 making that was unknown to Shantaramji —
 be it lighting, camerawork or editing."

Shantaram also gained the reputation of
 being a strict disciplinarian. Remembers
 Jeetendra: "I had a bad problem with lisp-
 ing. Shantaramji stalled the shooting of *Geet*
Gaya... (1964) for two days till I got my dia-
 logues clear." "Not a single minute was
 wasted on the sets," recalls Madhura, adding
 that "Unless and until the script, the directo-
 rial movements and shot divisions were
 completed and ready on his table, he did not
 begin shooting." Shantaram carried this at-
 titude to his home as well. "He was strict but
 never lost his temper for more than a few
 minutes. I remember, in 1982, when I began
 writing his autobiography *Shantarama*, I had
 to study all his films and notes. To gain thor-
 ough material for the book, I fixed an ap-
 pointment with him for 11.00 am in the
 morning. I was married then and had two
 children. Due to some reason or the other, I
 reached Rajkamal Studios at 11.20 am. He
 saw me and gave the clock on his table a
 pointed look. Immediately, I apologised, af-
 ter all I was the one who had suggested the
 time. You are 20 minutes late. Do you know
 the value of Shantaram's 20 minutes?" he
 asked," reminisces Madhura.

Shantarama, later in 1993, was made into
 a documentary by Madhura. The 53-minute
 film, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, was chosen to be-
 gin the celebrations formally last evening.



LEGACY RELIVED
 Clockwise from
 (t): Shantaram
 th family;
 ughter Madhura
 sraj and son
 ran Shantaram;
 ndhya and
 antaram with
 Jawaharlal Nehru



n on our education, or on our choosing
 om to marry, he believed that a married
 man should devote her time to her home
 family." Like all great men, Shantaram
 also very particular and meticulous.
 nce during the time of *Jhanak Jhanak...*
 55), Gopi Krishna and he went to see the
 where the Radha-Krishna dance was to
 filmed. The entire set had already been
 lt, but after seeing it Gopiji pointed out
 t it would not be easy to dance on that
 or and that the feet will be sore for at least
 ay after the shooting. Papa immediately

Three films have
 also been incorporated into the Inter-
 national Film Festival (from Nov 24-30) or-
 ganised by MAMI. According to Kiran
 Shantaram, Shantaram's son and MAMI's
 founder and trustee, a special section on the
 film-maker will feature *Do Aankhen Baraah*
Haath, *Navrang* and *Aadmi*. Besides, keep-
 ing in mind Shantaram's love for children —
 he was the chairman of CFSI — drawing,
 dancing and drama competitions have been
 organised. Film festivals and seminars will
 also be held during the year.